

Mayflower makes a surprise exit

By John O'Keefe
The Patriot Ledger

PLYMOUTH — Something is missing from Plymouth Harbor. It's Mayflower II.

The disappearance of the waterfront's most noticeable feature took people in town by surprise yesterday.

Plimoth Plantation, which maintains the floating museum, did not announce the departure and no notice was posted for visitors to the state pier.

The 40-year-old replica of the Pilgrims' vessel left port in Plymouth Harbor yesterday morning for the first time in two years and was towed by a tugboat to Fairhaven for dry-dock repairs to its hull and mast.

"We saw the tugboat come in this morning, but we don't know where it's going," Assistant Harbormaster Richard Furtado said.

Peter Arenstam, who supervises Mayflower II maintenance for Plimoth Plantation, could not explain why the museum did not put up a notice about the repairs. "That's not my decision," he said.

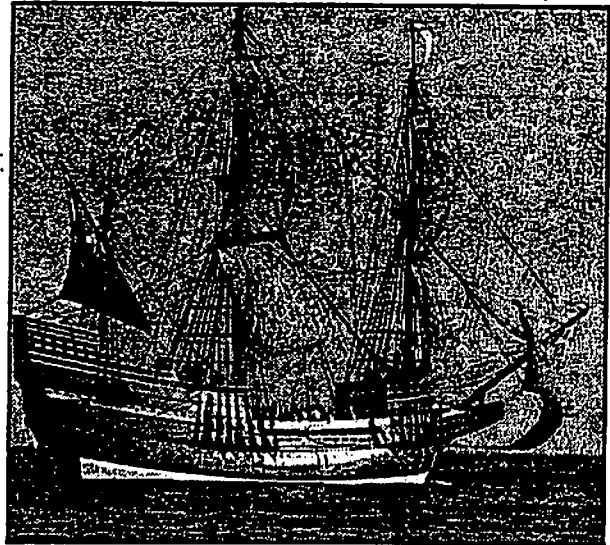
Keith White, a security guard at the exhibit, was told to tell visitors the ship was being repaired and would return in a few weeks. "We're here all the time, even when the ship's not. So they don't need a sign," he said.

Arenstam said the ship should be gone no more than two weeks. Its hull will be cleaned and repainted, and its mainmast will be removed and refurbished, he said.

The repairs are part of a long-term restoration plan, Arenstam said. Most of the work will be done by plantation artisans, who have been renovating the ship's interior since March.

Yesterday's six-hour sail, which took the ship through the Cape Cod Canal, was smooth. "It was a nice day," said Arenstam, who was on board with five other plantation employees.

Mayflower II originally was scheduled to be dry-docked last week, but stormy weather postponed the trip to yesterday. The tugboat Jaguar towed the vessel



File photo

Mayflower II has been towed out of town for repairs.

The disappearance of the waterfront's most noticeable feature left people asking questions.

to Kelly's Shipyard in Fairhaven.

The ship was last dry-docked in 1996, when it was taken to Gloucester for maintenance work and inspection.

The Mayflower II must undergo a periodic Coast Guard inspection to maintain its certification as seaworthy. Legislation sponsored by former Congressman Gerry Studds in 1992 allowed the Coast Guard to certify the Mayflower II as fit to carry passengers despite its 17th-century safety equipment.

Arenstam said plantation officials chose to do the work in Fairhaven because it is closer to Plymouth. "That's about as local as we can get," he said, noting that few shipyards have dry docks big enough for the 110-foot ship.

Mayflower II last sailed under its own power in 1995, when it traveled to Provincetown as part of Plymouth's 375th anniversary festivities.

In 1992 the ship was towed for the winter to St. Augustine, Fla., where it was damaged in a storm and had to be repaired. The trip south, designed to promote the plantation and town as tourist destinations, ended up costing the the plantation about \$100,000.

Mayflower II, a gift from England to the United States, was built in Devonshire, England, and sailed to Plymouth in 1957.

The original Mayflower returned to England in May 1621 and was used for trade between London and France until 1624, when it was scuttled in Rotherhithe on the Thames.